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SENSITIVE
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TAGS: PGOV PREL EAID ECON CN

SUBJECT: COMOROS CABINET RESHUFFLE

¶1. (SBU) SUBJECT: Union of the Comoros President Sambi made sweeping changes to his cabinet June 24, dismissing some competent and loyal Ministers in favor or several unknowns. END SUBJECT.

¶2. (SBU) President Sambi has made the most dramatic changes to his cabinet since taking office in 2006: there are seven new Ministers (out of 10, plus the two Vice Presidents who also have portfolios - see para 6), most of them relatively unknown. Only Vice President Idi and Ministers Jaffar, Affraitane, and Okacha kept the same jobs. Vice President Ikililou also remains, dropping the health portfolio and taking up Finance and Budget.

¶3. (SBU) Among those dismissed, former Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs Mmadi is most significant; he was thought to be in President Sambi's inner circle and leading on sensitive issues like the March Inter-Comoran Dialogue, the May Constitutional Referendum, and the upcoming legislative elections. Mmadi's firing is a great surprise, but may be explained by a rumor circulating Moroni. It goes that an Arab Islamic delegation to the Comoros, hosted by the Union Government, was embarrassed at their hotel because the bills were not paid. The "Grand Cadi" of Moroni (an elder Imam) had to guarantee payment to avoid further incident, because Mmadi could not be reached. Later, the Cadi saw President Sambi at Mosque and dressed down the President in front of many onlookers for the incompetence of his Ministers and the shame they brought on the Comoros for their treatment of these guests. (If true, this would be more than enough for even a loyalist like Mmadi to get the boot).

¶4. (SBU) The donors are most disappointed to see Minister of Finance Ali Soilihi fired; he is a competent technocrat who has been vital to restoring relations with the Bank and the Fund. The timing of his dismissal makes it worse; delegations from both international financial institutions have been in Moroni this very week for negotiations. (Ikililou will not/not inspire confidence with the IFIs or other donors. His performance on Health was mediocre at best, Finance/Budget are more complicated and more politically sensitive). Also dismissed was the competent and dynamic former Minister of Telecommunications Bakar. Never a political insider, Bakar hung around simply because he is sophisticated and dedicated. (The rumor above about Mmadi also implicates Bakar somehow, perhaps taking them both down). It is important to note the Chief of Cabinet in charge of Defense Dossar, while not officially listed in the decree because he does not technically hold a ministerial portfolio, kept his job and remains among the most powerful on Sambi's team.

¶5. (SBU) Most of the new Ministers are relatively unknown, having spent recent years in the private sector or abroad. However, two were promoted from within government. The new Minister of Justice, Miftah Ali Bamba, was Secretary General of the same ministry. Minister of Health Hodhoae Inzouddine has held several positions, including Secretary General at Foreign Affairs - he is the only newcomer well known to EmbOffs.

New Union Government:

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¶6. (U) The President's June 24 Decree, citing the 2001 Constitution and the 2009 referendum revisions, named the following new Government of the Union of the Comoros:

-- IDI Nadhoim, Vice President, in charge of Ministries of Transport, Tourism, and Investment (same);

-- IKILILOU Dhoinine, Vice President, in charge of Ministries of Finance, Budget and Womens' Entrepreneurship (a Mohelian, he formerly had the Health portfolio);

-- Amhed Ben Said JAFFAR, Minister of External Relations, Cooperation, Diaspora, Francophonie, and Arab World (same);

-- HASSANE Ahmed El Barwane, Minister of Economy, Labor, International Trade, Responsible for Parliamentary Affairs (a newcomer with a newly configured portfolio);

-- MIFTAH Ali Bamba, Minister of Justice, Prison Administration and Islamic Affairs (new);

-- Bourhane HAMIDOU, Minister of Interior and Information (a newcomer in a newly-created Ministry; "Interior" was an Island responsibility before the May 19 referendum);

-- Kamaliddine AFFRAITANE, Minister of National Education, Research, Culture, and Arts; Spokesman (same);

-- Hodhoae INZOUDDINE, Minister of Health, Solidarity and Gender (he is a longtime civil servant, once Secretary General at Foreign Affairs, taking this portfolio held for three years by VP IKILILOU);

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-- Mikidar HOUMADI, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, Environment, Energy, Industry, and Handicrafts (another newcomer taking over this mega-ministry);

-- Mohamed Larif OKACHA, Minister of Land Reform, Infrastructure, Urban Planning, and Housing (same, a Mohelian);

-- FOUAD Ben Mohadji, Minister of Civil Service, Administrative Reform, and Human Rights (new, a Mohelian);

-- Ahmed Abdou SIMBA, Minister of Post, Telecommunications, and Promotion of Technology (new).

COMMENT:

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¶7. (SBU) The new Comoran Cabinet faces two key challenges: implementing the new Constitution after the May 17 referendum and preparing for the upcoming legislative elections (Septel). The former centralized power in the Union more than any structure since independence and faces opposition from Grande Comore Island Governor Abdouwahabi, who insists on calling himself "president," refusing all mail addressed to the governor. The latter will elect deputies and island counselors who will meet in Congress to decide the date for the next executive elections; President Sambi will want a majority to stay in power beyond the end of his term in May, 2010.
END COMMENT.

MARQUARDT